Why physicians’ use of digital health is on the rise

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What’s the news: Physician use of technology to provide televists or virtual visits has doubled since 2016, with nearly 30% of doctors adopting the digital health technology, according to an AMA survey of 1,300 physicians.

The survey found that rising shares of physicians are using many digital health tools to enable:

- Consumer access to clinical data—58%.
- Point of care or workflow enhancements—47%.
- Clinical decision support—37%.
- Patient engagement—33%.
- Remote monitoring and management for improved care—22%.
- Remote monitoring for efficiency—16%.

Nearly 90% of doctors see at least some advantage in digital health tools, and more doctors are likely to see a definite plus to using them. That’s more likely to be the case among primary care physicians, 40% of whom see the sure upside in these digital health tools, compared with 33% of specialists—a change from the 2016 results.

While the 2016 survey found that physicians used an average of 2.2 of the seven digital health tools listed, that average rose to 2.4 in the newly published survey. Explore key steps, best practices and resources to support the implementation of digital health solutions with the AMA Digital Health Implementation Playbook.

Why it matters to patients and physicians: While drivers of physician adoption of digital health tools have remained consistent since the AMA’s 2016 survey, two elements have shifted in importance. One is that a technology “allows me to provide care remotely” and another is that it “helps reduce stress” or physician burnout. Doctors are most interested in using these tools to help deliver care for patients with chronic conditions.

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“The rise of the digital-native physician will have a profound impact on health care and patient outcomes, and will place digital health technologies under pressure to perform according to higher expectations,” said AMA Board of Trustees Chair Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, MD, MPH. “The AMA survey provides deep insight into the emerging requirements that physicians expect from digital technologies and sets an industry guidepost for understanding what a growing number of physicians require to adopt new technology.”

When it comes to adopting digital health solutions, the survey shows that physicians still need the same key questions answered:

- Does it work?
- Will I receive proper payment?
- Will I be liable?
- Will it work in my practice or workflow?

Physician respondents placed greater importance, compared with 2016, on the need for evidence of efficacy and standard medical liability insurance coverage for use of digital health tools.

Discover the six new digital health Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®) codes that you should know about.

**What’s next:** Physicians also weighed in on emerging technologies such as blockchain and augmented intelligence (AI), which is often called artificial intelligence. The AMA is committed to helping physicians harness AI in ways that safely and effectively improve patient care.

While 46% of physicians are familiar with the blockchain technology that, most famously, powers the Bitcoin cryptocurrency, 0% are using it.

Large majorities of physician respondents are familiar with the use of AI for health administration, clinical applications, precision medicine, business operations, population health, or research and development. However, actual use of AI hovers in the single-digit percentages for all categories with the exception of using AI for health administration, which 11% of doctors said they are doing.

Learn more about the AMA’s digital health leadership to ensure the physician perspective is represented in the design, implementation and evaluation of new health care technologies.